COMIX WORLD 97. June 1, 1978. Copyright by Clay Geerdes, Box 7081, Berkeley, Ca 94707. All Rights Reserved. Subs: $5 for 24. Write for my photo list--seven years of historical pix now in print. Logos this issue by Shelton and Sheridan and Bill Sherman.* Those of you who have been waiting to get at that Freak Brothers art will now have your chance. The big showing begins June 1 at Si Lowinsky's gallery on 228 Grant Street in San Francisco. Looks like Shelton and Sheridan are so prolific that they haven't got room at the Rip Off warehouse to store that artwork anymore. Gilbert says the big 64-page-color Freak Bros book should be out by July. Published by High Times, it will be called RIPPED WITH THE FABULOUS FURRY FREAK BROTHERS. In the Wonder Wart-hog serial running in a lot of papers right now, the Hog of Steel is taking on superheroism, particularly the gimmicky style of Marvel.* Larry Todd has finished illustrating Harlan Ellison's Chocolate Alphabet. Put that one on your list. Larry's getting more into natural science these days, living out Dr. Atomic more than drawing him. Said Larry, "Drawing comics was a great way to spend my twenties, but..." Walter Bachner has just published Larry's Moby Gleep painting as a poster. Details next issue.* I went over to see The Nickelettes do Curtains at Intersection and had to stand up! Sold out. A funny satire on Agatha Christie's mystery-style with a proscenium made out of crawling cockroaches and a girl who metamorphoses Kafka-style into a cockroach. Great costume. The Nicks have been on the scene since 1971. They played the first 2 Berkeley Comic Cons as many of you remember.* Sad to hear that Tante Leny comes to an end with #25. Some of the funniest comics I've ever read have been in the Tante Lenys. Evert Geradts says plans are being made for a new magazine. Good luck! *

NOTHING IS NEW. As a kid one of my favorite images was Uncle Scrooge McDuck wallowing in his money bin. Well, it was clear that Carl Barks was an avid reader of Greek history among other subjects and when I re-read Suetonius' The Twelve Caesars recently, I found this passage about Caligula: "At last he developed a passion for the feel of money and, spilling heaps of gold pieces on an open space, would walk over them barefoot, or else lie down and wallow. His daughter's birth gave him an excuse for further complaints of poverty." Scrooge McDuck is a lot more like Caligula than he is like Dickens' Ebenezer Scrooge; that's for sure.* Meanwhile, Bob Vojtko is doing LOW-BUDGET #5 as a 32-pager! $1, $2 for a signed copy, or $5 for a copy with a hand-colored cover. 1120 Euclid, Lorain Ohio 44052. Vojtkomics on the move.* The second POGO fanzine is out. $4 from Don Phelps, P. O. Box 85, Cohasset, MA 02025. If you love Kelly and Pogo, this will tickle you totally.* In Germany, Ray Martin has published a beautiful edition of Corben's Rowlf. 8531 Linden, Nurnberg, West Germany.* Cascade Comix Monthly #3 has a long interview with Dan O'Neill. $1 from Artie Romero, 432 S. Cascade, Colorado Springs, Colo 80903.* Crumb and Spiegelman in L'Echo Des Savanes 39. 11 Rue Portefoin 75003 Paris.* Will Pretty Baby start a run on slim 12-year-old girls? Will Child porn become chic now that there are more laws against it? Will neighborhood whorehouses become faddist and serve frozen yogurt for dessert?* In San Francisco, the wheelers closed down Coming Home via protest because the management didn't provide them access to the theater, no ramps. They missed the worst film of the year. I think people are praising the film for it's intentions, not its reality, and out of guilt, not honest appraisal. As a film, it's Class C exploitation or less, a rip-off of One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest complete with the suicide of a young boy (Billy Bibbit revisited). If you go to see it, hang your credibility in the lobby.* A note from Larry Rippee re the Off-the-Cuff comix: "Justin Green brought the pages of his Spare Comics by to show Gary Arlington (we were roommates then) so I started drawing Baloney which Gary was going to publish . . .Justin's was published about the time I finished drawing mine then Scotty (the poet who wrote Slushpump Adams and Yucamobe) did a 7¢ of poetry Lullabye for a Speedfreak, I did the cover, those were the first three 7¢ books followed by one by a woman named Mary and many others. I drew covers for Scotty's Splat and Toy Dandruff, all 1972. I pasted up most of the 7¢ and did the stapling and cutting. The last thing I recall doing in that period (1973) was a cover for a Dada book called Purple Warp." Larry says he's finally getting into ugs after a long apprenticeship. Likes the work of Hunt Emerson. "He works out of joy or something. Here everyone is worried about money." Larry prefers the political ugs like Corporate Crime and Cover-up Lowdown of the new ones. He's at Rip Off Press a lot so those of you who want to write to him send mail to P. O. Box 14158, S. F. CA 94114.* Folks going to make that San Diego Con with us, I recommend the El Cortez motel, 7th and Ash, just across the street from the main hotel. $18-22 sez triple-A. Lots of ug people are going.* Bay Con IV is July 21-23 at California Hall in San Francisco (Turk at Polk Sts). Info from Sal Dichiera, P. O. Box 3931, San Fran, CA 94122.* Some people thought my review of Frescazizi's was negative. Not so. I loved that stuff! For me, complexity and obscurity are positive qualities in art. I get tired of things that are too simple.* Advertise and help out, folks. An ad the size of the Dark Destiny (2x4" camera ready) runs for three issues for only $10. Issue #100 coming out at the San Diego Con! Tell your friends to subscribe. C. G.

'Private Parts' returned

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — Police must return exhibits seized last week from the erotic art show "Private Parts." U.S. A District Judge also issued, pending trial, a temporary restraining order yesterday preventing police from arresting the artists involved in the show, many of whom are students and professors at the Rhode Island School of Design. Police had raided the non-profit art gallery Electron Movers near the design school and seized more than 40 photographs, drawings and a piece of jewelry. The suit claims the search warrant gave police discretion to choose what they considered obscene. Under a new anti-pornography law that defines obscenity as works totally without artist or social value. ZA 5-23-78

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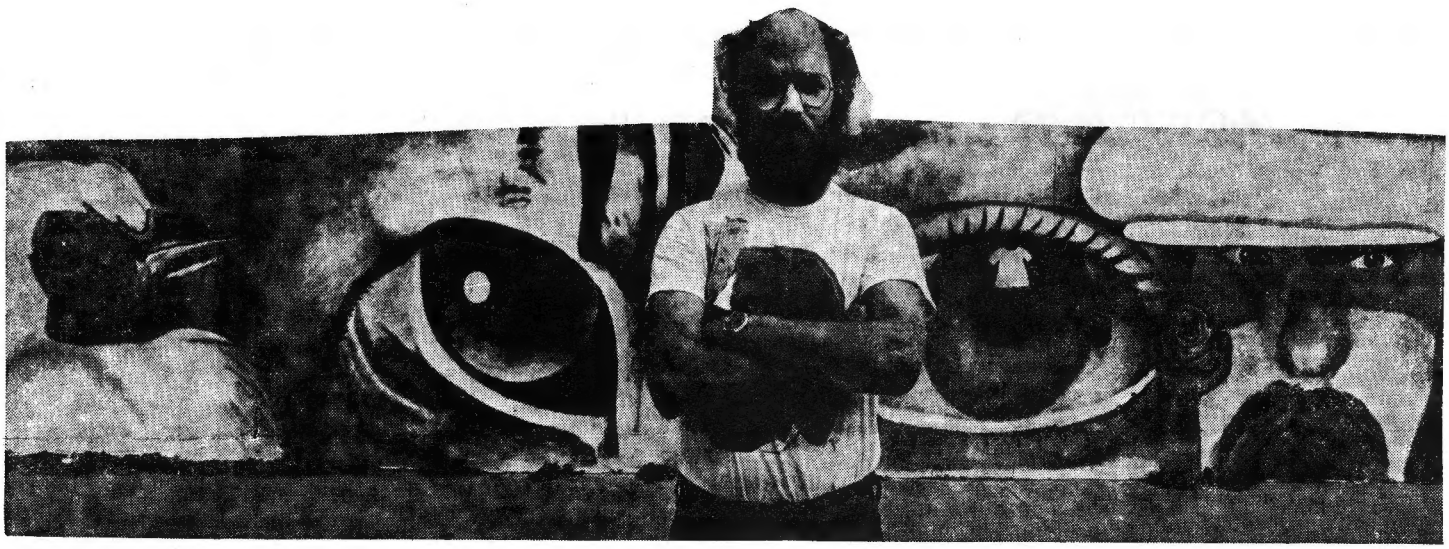

Staff Photo by Jim Dougherty

Artist Jim Franklin stands in front of the mural he painted on the wall of a t-shirt company on Barton Springs Road

Artist rides to success on armadillo

By ALLAN TURNER
American-Statesman Staff

When it comes to wildlife, Texas can't be topped. Just look at the postcards: There's that weird hybrid, the jackalope, half jackrabbit, half antelope, and those fish that take three men to carry.

And then, of course, there's the armadillo. Ah, the armadillo. The postcards describe him as a "strange breed of wild Mexican hog."

But Jim Franklin, Austin's famed father of the armadillo art movement, knows better.

"The armadillo is the realistic symbol of Texas," said Franklin, the bearded and baldish 34-year-old artist whose armadillo paintings adorn everything from T-shirts to beer advertisements. "Here we had something truly unusual in our own backyard and it was being ignored."

While Franklin views the awkward armadillo as almost a "mystical" creature, he readily admits that his early 'dillo paintings — inspired by a zoology textbook illustration — were motivated by expediency as much as anything else.

THE FIRST FRANKLIN armadillo appeared in September, 1968. At the time, Franklin was living at the Vulcan Gas Compnay, the city's first rock night club, and cranking out posters for Austin's emerging psychedelic music scene. And, he said, "armadillos were one of the things that filled in the blank."

"Art has saved my skin several times," recalled Franklin. "It gives me something to do. Without my art, I guess I'd be a pretty worthless person."

The first time it got him out of a jam was when he lost his notebook in elementary school. "It was due in class," he said, "but right before we had notebook period, we had art period. I drew this Indian horse with a handprint on its rump. I remember it fell together pretty well. The teacher liked it so much that she let me work on it while others handed in their notebooks."

By the time he was 10 or 11, Franklin was noted in his neighborhood as a sidewalk artist. "I had already proclaimed my intention of becoming an artist," he said, "although I didn't really realize what that meant."

What it meant in LaMarque, the small coastal petrochemical town in which he was reared, was to be different.

"My parents — my father ran a variety store — took a pretty low key approach to the whole thing," he recalled. "The only thing they pushed me on was to go into something I could make some money in. They wanted me to be an engineer — I had a cousin or something who was an engineer and he was doing well."

In junior high school, Franklin spent much of his spare time ripping art-section pages out of the school's *Time* magazines. "I had quite a file," he said. "Of course I only tore out my favorites."

BUT AROUND industrial, polluted LaMarque, where "I even got to like the smells," Franklin said, sports was in and art was out.

The high school offered no art programs. "I knew I would get no support from my peers," Franklin said. "A few teachers took to me, but the community's emphasis was on other things."

It was in high school that Franklin developed a lasting interest in speech, drama and black music.

And the fact that his interests were often ignored while sports was emphasized galled him. (Franklin bitterly recalled an incident in which a high school coach worked himself into tears at a post-defeat pep rally, blaming the loss in state competition on a lack of school spirit. "I had won first place in poetry reading," said Franklin, "and all they did was mention my name on the intercom.")

Franklin foiled his parents' plans for a profitable future as a professional by "deliberately taking high school courses that wouldn't get me into college," he said.

AFTER GRADUATION in 1962, he moved to San Francisco to study art. And after a year there, he made an illfated move to New York City.

"I was working in a jewelry store in New York, sorting costume jewelry when Kennedy was killed," he said. "It was pretty scary. People were damning Texans. They blamed all Texans for what had happened."

Those were bleak days. "It was your terrible, classic

See Artist, C5

ratty existence," he said.

And finally, with only 4 cents in his pocket, Franklin realized he had grown weary of the Big Apple. He had grown tired, he said, of eating leathery slabs of meat with the winos down at the welfare mission and the daily confrontations with a sour mission supervisor who wore his broken glasses taped to his face.

BUT MOST OF ALL, he was tired of the indifference to his art.

He moved to Galveston — his hometown — which he at least found picturesque.

Once there, he occupied a great old building, formerly used for sorting cotton. "It had a great skylight," he said. "It made a wonderful studio."

But fate struck again: His landlord decided the structure was worth more as a Turkish bath than as a $20-a-month home for a starving artist. Disillusioned with the limited artistic possibilities in Galveston, Franklin reluctantly concluded he would have to return to New York if he were to make a living.

Before leaving for the big city, though, Franklin met three Austinites, who told him alluring tales of abundant peyote and ample opportunities for rides to New York in Austin. "I found the peyote," Franklin said. "And I never bothered with the rides."

Franklin "slept on couches and freeloaded off people" while producing surrealistic paintings that were pleasant but not too profitable. "I still can't remember how I made it," he said.

When Vulcan Gas Co. opened in 1968, Franklin moved in, becoming something of a staff artist.

In September, 1968, he painted his first armadillo — an armadillo smoking a marijuana cigarette — for a free park concert handbill. The straight media ignored the nascent armadillo movement, but Franklin's work was an ovenight (though still poorly paid) success.

"SOME POEPLE point out that there were other artists drawing armadillos in Austin," he said. "That may be true, but I was unaware of it. I just sort of hung around at the Chuck Wagon — I didn't read the *Ranger*. That's part of the mystical thing — that the armadillo was developed almost simultaneously by different artists.

"I was and am continually surprised that it caught on. I wanted it to represent the real animal and not become another Mickey Mouse. Mickey Mouse has nothing to do with mice. I wanted the armadillo to be an armadillo and not some grinning little human."

In Austin, of course, Franklin's name became closely associated with the armadillo movement (he was a staff artist of and is a stockholder in Armadillo World Headquarters). Yet, he insists, he was determined that the "movement" would rise or fall on its own merits.

"I wanted to see what it would do without me pushing it," he said. "I didn't really try to cash in on it."

While the market for armadillo art in Austin may be largely a thing of the past, Franklin sees new markets for his art. "The question," he said, "is whether New Yorkers can identify with an armadillo."

MEANWHILE, FRANKLIN is ruminating on the nature of popular art and dividing his time between Austin, his studio-home in Fentress and several acres he owns in southeastern Utah.

"For an artist," he said, "Austin is the doldrums. It's located in a beautiful setting, but most of the land is privately owned. You can't walk around in it. Half my land in Utah is flat, the other half is verticle. I have a love affair with canyons, a lust for sandstone."

Furthermore, he said, he's growing weary of designing T-shirts, the sale of which provides the largest part of his income. "I'd like a patron," he said. "I'd like to be rich, but only because money equals supplies. I'd like to be able to do what I want to do."

He said he would like to paint another swimming pool. "I painted one for Leon Russell," he said, "and I never even got to swim in it." Or maybe, he would like to paint a mural as a backdrop to a band while the musicians are performing.

"Posters, T-shirts — all of that is prostitution, really. It may be the grooviest form of prostitution in the state, but it's still prostitution."

Franklin took another sip of his beer, then sighed, "Well, I guess it's still better than drawing girdles for the newspaper."

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